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Department of Health
and Social Services

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STATE OF ALASKA

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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First Alaskans receive COVID-19 vaccine; adverse reaction reported in health care worker in Juneau

CORRECTION: This press release has been updated to correct the number of doses of Pfizer vaccine that have been received from 31,500 to 35,100 doses.

December 16, 2020 ANCHORAGE – Hospital-based frontline health care workers were the Alaskans to receive their first dose of COVID-19 vaccine yesterday. Vaccination clinics began in some communities on Tuesday and are continuing today.

Distribution and delivery of the December allocation of 35,100 doses of Pfizer vaccine is also continuing today to the six hospitals who ordered the vaccine directly from Pfizer through the State of Alaska's Immunization Program and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC).

Unfortunately, Alaska also saw a presumed adverse reaction to the vaccine. A health care worker in Juneau who has no history of allergies had an anaphylactic reaction that included flushing and shortness of breath 10 minutes after receiving the vaccine at a clinic at Bartlett Hospital. The symptoms were discovered during the 15-minute observation period recommended by the CDC.

A press availability will be held at 10 am this morning with representatives from the Alaska Department of Health and Social Services, Bartlett Regional Hospital and the CDC available to answer questions. If you are a member of the media, contact Clinton Bennett for the ECHO link.

The worker took Benadryl after the symptoms began and when they did not resolve, the worker was admitted to the Emergency Department at Bartlett. The patient was administered Pepcid, Benadryl and epinephrine through intravenous drip and was kept overnight. The patient is in stable condition but is still in the hospital being monitored.

"We expected that a side effect like this could occur after reports of anaphylaxis were made in England after people there received the Pfizer-BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine," said Alaska's Chief Medical Officer Dr. Anne Zink. "All sites that are approved to provide vaccinations in Alaska must have medications on hand to deal with an allergic reaction and that was the case in Juneau."

This incident was reported last night to the CDC's Vaccine Adverse Event Reporting System (VAERS) database. The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services (DHSS) has been in close communication with the CDC, and the agency is providing guidance and support.

Clinics in Alaska will continue as planned. Every facility administering vaccine is being notified of this event.

More clinics are planned this week at hospitals around the state. December's vaccine allocation is limited and first available to:

- Hospital-based front-line health care workers at highest risk for COVID-19 infection
- Long-term care facility residents and staff (defined to include skilled nursing facilities, assisted living homes, and Department of Corrections infirmaries providing care that is similar to assisted living)
- EMS and fire personnel providing medical services
- Community Health Aides/Practitioners
- Individuals who are required to perform vaccinations

The vaccine will be offered to Alaskans in phases. The population groups included in each phase will be determined by the State of Alaska, according to recommendations provided by the Alaska COVID-19 Vaccine Allocation Advisory Committee and by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) Advisory Committee on Immunization Practices (ACIP). Vaccine will be available to more groups of people over time, until all Alaskans have access. Public comments may be received by [following the instructions in this link](#).

Additional information about the COVID-19 vaccine and Alaska's distribution plan may be found at Covidvax.Alaska.gov.

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